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UNCLAS SANTO DOMINGO 003791

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: DOMINICAN BEACH WATERS: STUDY FINDS HIGH LEVELS OF BACTERIA

1. An ecological study of Dominican beaches conducted in 2004 by Direcccon de Calidad Ambiental de la Secretaria de Medio Ambiente (Directorate of Environmental Quality of the Secretariat of the Environment) found that many coastal

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waters contain high levels of fecal residue. Bacterial analysis of 184 samples, collected from 79 beaches around the country, revealed that fecal coliforms (sewage-related bacteria) and fecal streptococcus bodies were present in the waters of at least 37 of the monitored beaches. Biologist Luis Carvajal warned in the press that these bacteria may cause diarrhea, dysentery, pharyngeal inflammation, and lung and respiratory diseases in bathers. According to researchers, the contamination is largely due to the lack of adequate waste water treatment systems.

2. There are 197 beaches in the country, 71 in the north, 54 in the east, and 72 on the southwestern coast. These form the backbone of the Dominican tourism industry as nearly 95% of all tourists come for the beaches. The negative findings of the study may cause prospective tourists to vacation elsewhere, resulting in major losses for the Dominican tourism industry and hurting the Dominican economy overall.

3. The highest levels of contamination were found in the waters close to urban areas. For example, in the capital, Santo Domingo, bacteriological problems were present on the beaches in Guibia and Manresa, in the Boca Chica-San Pedro area, in La Caleta, Andres, Caribe, Guayacanes, Costa Linda, Villa del Mar, El Muerto, Santa Beach, and Juan Dolio. The La Romana-Bayahibe area had the least fecal contamination, with the exception of the La Caleta and El Caletón beaches. Out of the 11 beaches monitored in the Punta Cana-Bavaro region, six had coliform levels exceeding the environmentally established norms for ocean waters.

4. The newspaper El Caribe, which reported results of the study on June 14, also mentioned a plan to restore water quality in 11 rivers around the country. The clean-up of the Ozama and Isabela rivers in the capital is to be financed and executed by the waste-producing industries and the five city councils of the National District and the province of Santo Domingo, as well as the Secretariats of Public Works and Public Health. According to Secretary of the Environment Max Puig, the government does not have the funds to properly treat the waters of the heavily polluted rivers and must therefore rely on "international loans and help from the private sector."

5. Drafted by Diana Flewelling. This report and others can be found on our SIPRNET site at <http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/wha/santodomingo/> .
HERTELL